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Office of the State Archaeologist Assists in Forensic Archaeology Recoveries

By Jonathan Leader

The Office of the State Archaeologist (OSA) has been involved since its inception in 1963 with forensic archaeological recovery. South Carolina's steady growth and development of the historic landscape

MRD to the State Law Enforcement Division to assist in search and forensic analyses.

The effect on the OSA was immediate. There have been quite a few high profile cases in South

asked to help. To date, the OSA has assisted, consulted with, or acted in support of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, US Army Counter Terrorism Task Force, US Marine Corps, US Navy Investigations Unit, the SC State Law Enforcement Division, and quite a few South Carolina county sheriffs, county coroners, medical examiners, and city police departments. Unfortunately, these activities are rarely permitted to be published for legal reasons.

Realizing that one of the benefits of this kind of activity is the training of professionals; the OSA recently reestablished a link to the USC Department of Anthropology in this area to ensure the involvement of students. Dr. Laura Cahue, physical anthropologist in the Department, has been working with me on several consults and recently brought a class studying forensic techniques into the field in support of a law enforcement recovery project. The closely supervised exercise was very successful.

On the national level, OSA is in discussion with Brown University's



Fig. 1: A K9 unit in use delineating an area for search by ground penetrating radar. (SCIAA photo by Jonathan Leader)

has from time to time impinged on burials and cemeteries from all time periods and all cultures.

Approximately 100 consultations occur every year.

In 1999, the OSA involvement moved to a much higher level that has continued to the present. This was the result of the South Carolina legislature recognizing that the Institute needed more advanced equipment to properly accomplish its legal mandates. Two remote sensing packages were funded; ground penetrating radar for OSA and a side scan sonar, sub bottom profiler, and magnetometer for the Maritime Research Division (MRD). A provision was added to the funding bill that seconded both OSA and

Carolina. In very rapid succession, OSA was contacted by the law enforcement agencies involved and



Fig. 2: Forensic investigation flag marking area of interest. (SCIAA photo by Jonathan Leader)

Forensic Archaeological Recovery group to provide regional cooperative support, training, and in times of disaster, deployment. National certification of technicians is always desirable, and OSA is pleased to be involved. The cooperative agreement should be in place later this year.

The ground penetrating radar purchased by the legislature is aging. Electronic equipment has a very short use life before it is made obsolete by advancements in technology. Fortunately, the success of the program instituted in 1999 has not been lost on the legislature. Several members have expressed interest in purchasing an updated package.

Recently, I received an award from the Richland County Sheriffs Office as a member of the Cold Case Team for 2005. It is nice to know that OSA's efforts have had a direct impact on this vital area of community safety.



Fig. 4: SCIAA ground penetrating radar in use. (SCIAA photo by Jonathan Leader)



Fig. 3: Area of interest at an undisclosed location. (SCIAA Photo by Jonathan Leader)